

THE TV SCENE---**Ah, Well, You Just Can't Win 'em All**

BY CECIL SMITH—

There are many approaches you can take to fill this space before it is inevitably consigned to the bottom of a bird cage. You can write chitchat about TV, you can follow the dubious pastime of pasting up publicity handouts, you can sit on your duff and watch the



Paul Richards

screen and comment on programs after they're gone. I have the feeling one should dig into material before it reaches the air, to try and point out the unusual and extraordinary that does turn up now and again. There are many ways of doing this—haunting studios to look at films and tapes in advance, spending endless hours on sets, reading scripts in advance. Mostly, the task is a thankless one. A case in point:

About six months ago I was talking to actor Paul Richards, a casual social conversation in which he mentioned casually that he was doing a five-part play for *The Lawless Years*. This seemed strange because *The Lawless Years* was not on the air. And, to my knowledge, there had never been a five-part play on TV. Paul talked of the character he was playing, a fascinating individual known in gangsterdom as Louy K. Louy came to this country as a wild, young rabbinical student with a genius IQ. When his young sister was violated by toughs before his eyes, he cried out that he had to be a man, tore up his holy vestments and joined the lawless gangs of the lawless years. He became the brain that established the syndicate, brought the gangsters into one terrifying closed corporation. When his sister died, he gave it up and walked away, crying to the mobsters: "You are all filth."

The Plot Thickens

NBC at the time knew nothing about the project, even though *Lawless Years* is their show. However, this spring the series was brought back to the air as a summer replacement with the five-part story scheduled to begin June 2. I asked the network to gather the cast together again, to take color pictures, such as the one we ran last Sunday on the cover of *TV Channels*. I went out to Goldwyn and saw the two and a half hours of film, talked to Allen Miner who wrote and directed it. Allen said of *The Lawless Years*: "This show is a political football at NBC. They kind of disown it, even though it preceded the *Untouchables* to the air."

Crowning Blow

I heard the echo of Allen's words when the network suddenly juggled the scheduling of the show, making all the publicity useless. I wired the sponsor's agent and he promptly juggled it back again with the words that "believe it or not, this is the first I've heard that there was any publicity campaign . . ." Then the crowning blow. Rabbis in New York looked at the show and decided its opening episode offended the Jewish religion, so the first episode was canceled. It begins tonight with chapter 2 (Channel 4 at 9).

Said Miner: "I'm a Jew, a good Jew. I had rabbis on the set when we filmed it, I showed it to a board of rabbis here. They were not offended. This last-minute cancellation of the opening episode can wreck the show — it destroys the whole motivation for Louy's actions. If we have to use this medium as a journeyman craft when it should be an art, what's the point of working this hard to do something right, something truthful? You might as well get out and go sail a boat."

Sometimes you simply feel you can't win.